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MEMORANDUM OF CONVERSATION

PARTICIPANTS: Ignacio Masferrer, Consul, Spanish Embassy,
Buenos Aires
Dr. Franco Mistretta, Consul, Italian Embassy,
Buenos Aires
F. Allen Harris, Political Officer,
American Embassy, Buenos Aires

DATE : February 21, 1979

SUBJECT : Clandestine Detention of Political Prisoners

This conversation took place at a periodic human rights working lunch organized by Italian Consul Mistretta. These ad hoc lunches allow the exchange of views about the human rights situation in Argentina between the Italian, Spanish, French, Vatican and United States Embassies. The French and Nunciatura representatives were not present.

Buenos Aires Clandestine Detention Facility

Spanish Consul Dr. Masferrer said that he had some important and shocking news to share on a strictly confidential basis. He reported that he had just completed arrangements for a Spanish-Argentine dual national woman to travel to Spain who had been held as a clandestine prisoner from August, 1978 until mid-January, 1979 in a military facility within the city limits of Buenos Aires which was only three blocks from the house in which she had grown up.

According to Masferrer, two of the woman's brothers had been active Peronists in Buenos Aires Province. One had been the private secretary of the Peronist Buenos Aires Provincial Minister of Agriculture, Gallo Mendoza. Both these brothers had been abducted earlier and were presently being held under executive detention. The woman informed Masferrer that in August, 1978 she was abducted and was taken to an interrogation facility which she heard from reports of other prisoners with whom she was held was located on the military base near Puente 12 on the Ezeiza Airport Road. (Note: The Tablada Army barracks is located near that road junction.) She reported to the Spanish Consul that she was interrogated extensively regarding her brothers' political activities, friends and associates. She said that her interrogation was accompanied with the use of an electric picaña which was administered under the supervision of "a doctor" who advised the persons

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Margaret P. Grafeld, Director

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applying the electric device when to stop and start the picana applications. The woman reported that she was raped repeatedly during her detention at the "Puente Doce facility."

The woman reported that in early September she and all the prisoners were transferred from the "Puente 12 facility" in closed trucks to another facility. After several weeks at the new facility she was told that she had been found to be "recuperable" and would be released after a period of "reeducation." From this point on she reported that she was allowed to move freely within the small building where she was housed with between 40 to 50 other prisoners at any one time. She was responsible for both washing clothes and cooking. She received ideological "treatment" at the facility. The woman reported that when her blindfold was removed, she recognized the facility where she was detained as being a military building complex only three blocks from the house in which she had grown up in Buenos Aires. The facility is an Army establishment near the General Paz Circular Road near the city limits of Buenos Aires (hold closely).

She reported that there were five or six other buildings where prisoners were kept on the compound. She presumed that these held about the same number of prisoners as her building. She estimated that there were between 200 and 300 prisoners being held in this facility when she was released in mid-January, 1979.

Dr. Masferrer reported that the woman had sought the protection of the Spanish Embassy immediately after her release. Masferrer said that as soon as Argentine authorities issued her an identification card, the Spanish Consulate arranged for her to leave Argentina for Brazil. There preparations were made for her to be issued a Spanish passport which she used for her onward travel to Spain.

Dr. Masferrer cautioned that this information be closely held within the U.S. and Italian governments as the woman was threatened before her release that if she released any information regarding her captivity, her brothers would be killed.

Masferrer said that he had several long interviews with the woman and that he had personally driven by the facility where she claimed she had been held. He described the facility as being a normal looking Army facility guarded by soldiers with rifles. The facility was surrounded by a high brick wall and only some roof tops could be seen from the street.

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Follow-Up Meeting

I called on Consul Masferrer again on March 15 to review the preceding information in light of several questions that had arisen within the Embassy. Masferrer, a lawyer by training, carefully reviewed his source's information with me. I believe that Masferrer is reporting accurately what he was told. Furthermore, he is convinced that the woman told him the truth. He admitted however, that he had not asked her enough questions to be able to judge how long the other prisoners had been held. He recalled clearly his source's statement that the majority of the other prisoners were blindfolded. Furthermore, he added that his source had said that prisoners were held in different partitioned "rooms" under a common shed. The units were close together inside a single compound.

His source replied to his questions regarding the number of prisoners by stating that there were between two and three hundred prisoners. Masferrer said that his source explained that the total figure was a "deduction" (sic) from the number of prisoners in her section and the number of similar units in the facility.

Drafter's Comments:

This appears to be a credible report. Unfortunately, the information is not as complete and detailed as probably could have been obtained from this source with better elicitation. The major weaknesses in the report are the lack of knowledge of the time spent in this clandestine facility by the other prisoners and the softness of the data on the total number of prisoners.

What we have is a fix on a detention facility within the city limits of Buenos Aires and a report that the Puente 12 facility has been closed. It is another small piece in the mosaic of Argentine repression, but in an area of very limited information.

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